Salazar Probe in L.A. Is Accused of 'Racism'

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LOS ANGELES (UPI)—Mexican-Americans, upset today by what they called "racist" and "prejudicial" proceedings, disrupted and then walked out of a coroner's inquest into the death of newsman Ruben Salazar during rioting in East Los Angeles.

One of those leaving was Esteban Torres, president of the Congress for Mexican-American Unity, who said that if the beginning of the inquest was any indication, it would be "a waste of time."

The disruption came during testimony, being televised live locally, by Capt. Tom W. Pinkston, who was in charge of the sheriff's operations during the disturbance Aug. 29.

Torres said Pinkston was using the inquest as "a public forum to justify his actions" during the riots and that the testimony about the disturbances before Salazar's death would prejudice the jury of four women and five men.

The inquest was ordered to determine whether Salazar died an accidental death or "at the hands of another." Prosecution is up to the District Attorney's Office.

At the opening of the proceedings, delayed for nearly an hour because the first jury was "contaminated" when it was questioned by newsmen, pathologist Dr. David M. Katsuyama testified about the wounds of Salazar, who was hit in the head by a tear gas projectile fired by deputy sheriffs.

"No medical assistance could have saved him." Dr. Katsuyama said.

Salazar was one of three victims of the rioting which left more than $1 million damage after an antiwar parade and rally in the predominantly Mexican-American area.